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DAN SMOOT

ISRAEL—PART III

Without U.S. political support, the state of Israel probably never could have been created. Without U.S. economic support, Israel probably could not have survived.

U.S. government aid to Israel has totaled about $1.5 billion in 20 years — which means that Americans have been taxed to provide approximately $600 for every man, woman, and child presently living in Israel. The federal government also helps Israel economically by granting tax exemption to organizations whose primary purpose is to raise money for Israel from private sources in the U.S. High officials of our government often make speeches at rallies to promote fund-raising for Israel.

When the 1967 Arab-Israeli war began, the United Jewish Appeal (which exists to raise money in the U.S. for Israel, and which enjoys federal tax exemption) asked for $200 million in contributions for Israel. Many individual gifts of $1 million, and several in six figures, were made immediately. In New York City alone, $20 million was raised in a day or two; $3.5 million in Chicago; $3 million in Philadelphia; $2.5 million in Boston.[1]

The United Jewish Appeal has raised as much as $365 million a year for Israel.[2] Most of this money is contributed by wealthy people who deduct the contributions from their federal income taxes. Other Americans must be taxed, of course, to make up the resulting loss of tax revenue for the federal government. The vast annual flow of tax-free money to Israel also adds greatly to the U.S. balance-of-payments deficit, which has created the worst U.S. monetary crisis in this century.

In short, Americans have been very generous to Israel — so generous, in fact, that Israeli leaders seem to think Israel can count on U.S. support even if Israeli actions are embarrassing or damaging to the United States.[3] In a sense, the mighty U.S. has become a captive of the little socialist nation of Israel which our politicians helped create and which the bounty of our people and of our government has subsidized.

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For example, Israel unilaterally decided to invade Egypt in 1956 — knowing this would bring on a long chain of serious consequences for the U.S., but so unconcerned about our reaction that she did not even give us warning.

The most brazen demonstration of Israel's indifference to, or contempt for, U.S. public feeling and U.S. national interests occurred in 1967.

In the spring of that year, when war clouds were darkening over the Middle East, an Israeli official publicly announced that the United States had committed the U.S. Sixth Fleet (based in the Mediterranean) to help Israel. The U.S. denied that any such commitment had been made.[4] This denial made no difference to Arabs. The Israeli statement sounded like the truth to them.

Arab resentment of the United States flared into violence. Mobs stoned and burned U.S. diplomatic facilities. Lives of American tourists and businessmen were in danger. By the first of June, it was apparent that evacuation of some 20,000 American citizens from Arab countries would soon be necessary.

On June 2, 1967, the U.S.S. *Liberty*, a U.S. Navy communications ship, with a crew of 275, left Rota, Spain, bound for the Eastern Mediterranean. Her mission was to assure communications between U.S. government posts in the Middle East and to help with communications problems involved in the massive evacuation of Americans.

While the *Liberty* was enroute, the Arab-Israeli war began, June 5. On June 8, the *Liberty* was cruising at 5 knots in international waters about 15 miles off the coast of the Sinai Peninsula (Egyptian territory). At about 1:30 p.m., two Israeli jets flew over the *Liberty*, taking a good look at her. Seas were calm. Visibility was practically unlimited. The American flag was flying on the ship, and her name and other identification marks were prominently in view.

At about 2:00 p.m., three Israeli jets made several strafing runs on the *Liberty*, splattering decks and hull with some 821 rocket and cannon hits. The *Liberty* (armed only with four 50-caliber machine guns) never returned the fire. Some crewmen apparently were killed before they could reach their battle stations. About 20 minutes after the strafing, three Israeli patrol boats appeared and attacked the *Liberty* with guns and torpedoes. One torpedo-hit flooded a compartment and drowned 24 crewmen. Total American casualties in the two attacks which lasted about 30 minutes: 34 dead, 75 wounded. Damage to the ship was critical.

Soon after the attack by Israeli patrol boats, another Israeli boat and a helicopter came by and apologized, saying the *Liberty* had been mistaken for an Egyptian ship. Later, the Israeli government formally apologized.

The U.S. government accepted the apology but rejected the explanation that the attack was accidental. On June 10, 1967, the U.S. Defense Department released a statement saying:

"[We] cannot accept an attack upon a clearly marked noncombatant U.S. naval ship in international waters as 'plausible' under any circumstances whatsoever. . . .

"The suggestion that the United States flag was not visible and the implication that the identification markings were in any way inadequate are both unrealistic and inaccurate. The identification markings of U.S. naval vessels have proven satisfactory for international recognition for nearly 200 years."[4]

Obviously, the attack on the *Liberty* was a deliberate decision by some important Israeli officer.

One published account in June, 1967, said the Israelis deliberately tried to sink the *Liberty*, knowing it was American, because it had intercepted and recorded messages proving that Israel had started the war with surprise attacks. Israeli and American officials denied this story — on the grounds that it was "unthinkable," because Israel regards the U.S. as her chief ally.[4]

Israeli behavior in 1968, however, suggests the possibility that Israel feels safe in defying her "chief ally" at will — believing that zionist economic and political influence in the U.S. is strong enough to guarantee U.S. support of Israel regardless of what Israel does.

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On December 26, 1968, two Arab terrorists attacked, with hand grenades, an El Al (Israeli) commercial airliner at the airport in Athens, Greece. One Israeli citizen was killed, another wounded. The plane was severely damaged. The terrorists were arrested immediately and jailed in Athens, where they will stand trial under Greek law. The Arabs were carrying leaflets of the Popular Front For the Liberation of Palestine, an Arab commando group (*fedayeen*) which has offices in several Arab countries, including Lebanon. The Israeli government said the two men traveled to Athens on a commercial airliner which they boarded at Beirut, Lebanon.[5]

There is no indication that Lebanon was responsible in any way for the two men.[6] Apparently, they are not even Lebanese citizens, but are from a camp of refugees driven from their homes in Palestine by the Israelis. In fact, Lebanese and Israeli officials had a meeting the day after the attack on the El Al plane at Athens. The Israelis made no protest about the attack, and said nothing about Lebanese responsibility.[7]

Nonetheless, Israel retaliated against the nation of Lebanon.

On December 28, 1968, a strong detachment of Israeli soldiers, traveling in military helicopters, made a 45-minute raid on the Beirut airport. They inflicted no personal injuries, and sustained none; but they destroyed on the ground all airplanes with Arab markings, after removing from the planes, at gun point, passengers and personnel. Published reports said 13 commercial airplanes (representing half of Lebanon's entire commercial airlines fleet) were destroyed. Eight of the planes belonged to Middle East Airlines (which is partially owned by the U.S. Commodity Credit Corporation, an agency of the U.S. government); two belonged to Lebanese International Airways (55% of whose stock is owned by U.S. shareholders); three belonged to Trans-Mediterranean Airways (owned by Lebanese private interests).[3] Israeli defense minister Moshe Dayan — acknowledging in a tv interview that the Beirut airport raid was an official Israeli army operation — said 14 planes were destroyed.[8] Ownership of the 14th plane has not been disclosed.

The fact that Israel — presumed throughout the world to have a virtually unbreakable hold on United States support, including military support if needed — would attack a sovereign nation, in retaliation for the crimes of two individuals for whom the nation had no responsibility, raises a fearsome possibility: the possibility of some aggressive Israeli action, over which we have no control, involving us in war.

All major powers denounced Israel. The British said the Israeli attack on Beirut airport illustrates a "terrifying trend." The French called it deplorable. The Soviets said Israel should be compelled not only to pay damages, but to punish Israeli personnel who participated in the attack. U.S. Ambassador to the UN, J. R. Wiggins, called the raid on Beirut airport "a most regrettable Israeli action which my government condemns,"[6] saying there is a "difference between the acts of two individual terrorists and those of a sizeable official military force operating under government orders."[9]

Walt W. Rostow, President Johnson's special assistant for national security affairs, said:

"We think it is a grave matter for regular forces of the government of Israel to attack a civil international airport in a country which has been striving toward moderation in the Middle East."[6]

A special session of the UN Security Council was convened Sunday night, December 29, 1968. On December 31, all 14 nations represented (including the U.S. and the U.S.S.R.) voted unanimously to condemn Israel for its "premeditated military action in violation of its obligations under the [UN] charter and the cease-fire resolutions."[5] The resolution of denunciation asserted that Lebanon is entitled to redress for the destruction it suffered, and warned Israel that the UN Security Council "would have to consider further steps to give effect to its decisions" if Israel repeats such adventures as the raid on Beirut airport.[10]

The Israelis are contemptuous of UN resolutions. They also show contempt for the United States.

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Lebanon, with a population (half Christian, half Moslem) about the size of that of Israel (2.5 million) is traditionally pro-Western,[11] and is America's closest remaining friend in the Arab world.[3] Hence, the Israeli raid on Beirut airport — coming the day after announcement that the U.S. would sell 50 jet fighter aircraft to Israel for $200 million, and lend her part of the purchase price — was more than an embarrassment to the United States. It was a deliberate affront.

An AP dispatch from Tel Aviv, January 1, 1969, asserts that Israelis generally are boastful that the United States cannot "exert its will on Israel." Israelis proudly point out that "the likelihood of American disapproval did not deter the Israelis" from making the raid on Beirut airport.[10]

Outraged public feeling in Lebanon is pushing that once-neutral nation toward the militant Arab groups and their Soviet sponsors; and United States influence in Lebanon is rapidly disappearing — all of which, well informed Lebanese say, is exactly what Israel wants.

Pro-American Lebanese officials believe Israel is determined to alienate the U.S. from the entire Arab world, and to force a U.S. confrontation with the U.S.S.R. over the Middle Eastern problem, feeling that the United States will inevitably take the side of Israel.[12]

Not only among pro-American Lebanese officials, but also inside the U.S. State Department, there is strong opinion that Israel is deliberately using terrorist tactics against moderate Arab regimes in Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait, to drive these nations into the Soviet orbit and further away from the U.S. The purpose is to leave the U.S. with only one "client" or "friend" in the Middle East: Israel.

This conviction in the State Department (that Israel's truculent behavior is designed primarily to divest the United States of any remaining vestiges of Arab good will in the Middle East) was very strong following the Israeli attack on the Beirut airport. Influential U.S. officials wanted to cancel all U.S. arms deliveries to Israel. They were restrained from making this decision by President Johnson's orders to leave major policy changes to the incoming Nixon administration.[7]

WHAT SHOULD PRESIDENT NIXON DO? We will deal with that question next week, when concluding this four-part series of *Reports* on Israel.

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FOOTNOTES

(1) "From U.S., A Flood Of Aid To Israel," *U.S. News & World Report*, June 19, 1967, p. 8
(2) *The* (Flagstaff, Arizona) *Sun*, Apr. 25, 1968
(3) *The Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 31, 1968, p. 6
(4) *U.S. News & World Report*, June 26, 1967, pp. 33-4
(5) *Time* magazine, Jan. 3, 1969, p. 26 and Jan. 10, 1969, p. 27
(6) *The Dallas Morning News*, Dec. 30, 1968, p. 1
(7) "Washington Wire," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 10, 1969, p. 1
(8) Mike Wallace interview with Moshe Dayan, on the CBS *60 Minutes* tv program, broadcast Jan. 21, 1969
(9) Editorial, *The Dallas Times Herald*, Dec. 31, 1968
(10) *The Dallas Morning News*, Jan. 1, 1969, p. A4
(11) Extension of Remarks of U.S. Rep. John Rarick, *Congressional Record* (daily), Jan. 6, 1969, pp. E50-1
(12) "Frictions With Israel Push Lebanon Toward Aggressive New Policy," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 14, 1969, pp. 1, 10

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